

## Living in Their Times - Blak Lives Count

### 1967 Referendum Anniversary

*People in Australia have to register their dogs and cattle but we don't know how many Aborigines there are.*

-Faith Bandler, 1965

This year 2017 will be the 229 year since the artist Tracey Moffatt says; 'the white devils sailed in', into what is now Sydney Harbour and forever after destructively into the lives of Aboriginal people. It is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the strike by Palm Island Indigenous workers against low pay and conditions there. The seven leaders and their families were forcibly banished from the island in response.

It is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the successful 1967 Referendum on the status of Aboriginal people. The 1967 Referendum in Australia achieved an amazing 90.77% 'yes' vote. It meant Aboriginal people would be counted in the census, the national population figures, meaning they were to be reckoned with and potentially counted in regard to, health, housing, education policies and planning, and so on.

It also allowed for the Commonwealth government to make laws for Aboriginal people – to override state laws that disadvantaged us, although it never used this power. Unfortunately, in a way it let non-Aboriginal Australian off the moral hook, in fact, they could vote Yes in a morally correct way because it didn't cost or inconvenience them in their lives. The Commonwealth government and other instruments of the state didn't act even with such a convincing mandate.

The Referendum did not, as some think, give Aboriginal people the right to vote. Aboriginal people could enrol and vote by this time but it wasn't compulsory until 1983. So, although in most ways. Without real action developing from the 'state', the positive zeitgeist influenced by the 'civil rights' and Black power movements in the USA, moved Aboriginal people to take our own actions from hereon.

*This is my land and these are my people*

-Bungaree

One of the strongest results of this referendum was to empower us to be conscious of our own power, to define ourselves rather than allowing government and non-Aboriginal Australia to tell us who we are, how we should speak and live, and what we should be.

Djon Mundine OAM

Concept Curator of The Aboriginal Memorial